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ABSTRACT

The influence that trustees of seminaries and foundations can exert is discussed in three essays: "The Seminary as an Institution," "Mission in a Seminary," and "Critical Thought in the Seminary and the Trustee Chairperson's Role." The objective of the essays is to encourage a few seminary trustees to use their influence to bring one seminary to the position of greatness as "servant," both as a seminary and as a model of institutional quality that will be a positive influence in the culture. Trustees have the opportunity by questioning and persuasive leadership to encourage the seminary to: evolve an adequate theology of institutions, define in contemporary terms whom and what purpose the seminary can best serve, determine the best curriculum and method, give effective support to churches, and become a significant source of prophetic vision. Questions that might serve as a basis for discussing institutional mission include: Does the seminary see itself as a model for other institutions? Is critical thought a high priority in the seminary? Does the seminary experience develop spirit? Does the mission have power? Critical thinking is important for the seminary as an institution and for theology itself. The future of churches will be determined by the ideas, critical thought, that seminaries produce now and persuade churches to consider. (SW)

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SEMINARY AS SERVANT

essays on trusteeship
(revised)

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Contents

Introduction 1
The Seminary as an Institution 7
Mission in a Seminary 27
Critical Thought in the Seminary and the Chairperson's Role 45

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Introduction

THE ESSAYS THAT FOLLOW were written in recognition of two pervasive social problems: (1) Widespread alienation in all strata of the population, and (2) Inability or unwillingness to serve on the part of far too many of the institutions that make up our complex society. Each of these problems may be a contributing cause to the other and neither is likely to be healed without coming to terms with the other.

I believe that new religious insight is needed to deal with the dilemma that this reciprocal dependency presents (religious in the root meaning of rebind.) Such insight may come as a gift to any earnest seeker, but its availability to the many whose lives may be enriched by it will be greatly enhanced if seminaries embrace it, put it in a context so that churches may mediate it, and give sustaining support to churches as they do their work. Any seminary that performs well in this role will be truly a servant in our times. But, as I argue later, this achievement is unlikely to come unless the stated missions of seminaries require it — mission statements that have clarity and power and the ring of contemporaneity. Such mission statements are not likely to emerge until seminary trustees give a character of leadership that is not yet generally accepted.

The three essays were written to encourage a few seminary trustees to use their influence to bring *one* seminary to the position of greatness as servant, both as a seminary and as a model of institutional quality that will be a powerful leaven in the culture. If one seminary will achieve this, the less venturesome may take courage and try.

The three chapters were written in 1980, 1981, and 1983 at the suggestion of Dr. Robert W. Lynn, Vice President for Religion of Lilly Endowment, with whom I share a concern for enlarging the contribution of seminaries of all faiths to the enrichment of American society and to whom I am deeply indebted for helpful criticism of early drafts of these pieces. I am grateful for the incentive to write these because this work caused me to probe deeper than I might otherwise have done into facets of my long held interest in institutions, large and small, and the place of trustees and directors, particularly their chairpersons, in assuring the optimal performance of these institutions.

Out of my probings the idea of a *hierarchy of institutions* evolved. In this hierarchy I see, at the top, seminaries and foundations. Foundations are in that oversight position because they have the resources and the opportunity to gain perspective which enables them to provide conceptual leadership to colleges and universities, some of which seem in want of new directions which they are unable to find for themselves.

Seminaries are in a strategic position to give similar support to churches, whose needs are also urgent. In turn, both churches and universities are well placed to give nurture and guidance to individuals and to the whole range of "operating" institutions: governments, businesses, schools, hospitals, communities, families. Any effort to aid our ailing society might well start with a consideration of how the leadership of foundations and seminaries, each from its respective strategic position, might be made more effective.

In writing these essays the role of trustees of seminaries and foundations received fresh scrutiny. I had written earlier on this subject (Trustees as Servants — Chapter III of *Servant Leadership*, Paulist Press 1977) but in reflecting on the nature of this role in seminaries and foundations some new insights came. These two institutions, standing as they do at the top of the hierarchy of institutions, are in a precarious position (in their roles of servants of society) because they have little sheltering support available to them from other institutions. Since not many people are able as trustees to provide the constant regenerating influence that all institutions need if they are to serve and prosper over a long period of time, the durability of society rests on a few institutions (such as seminaries and foundations) acquiring self-regenerating capacity. These three essays are premised on the assumption that foundation and seminary executives and staffs, on their own, are not likely to pro-

vide this self-regenerating influence. It is for exceptional trustees to provide. "Exceptional" trustees are not necessarily high status persons by other standards. The ablest trustee chairperson I have seen, in considerable involvement with trustees in a range of institutions, is a low-status person by other standards — but truly great as a trustee and in the chair.

Since exceptional trustees, by definition, are not common, *if* some of this small number can be drawn into the care of foundations and seminaries, these two can then spread the influence of their exceptional trustees to all institutions. I see no better way for a needy society (as ours is) to be well served by its ablest citizens. But seminaries and foundations will need to rise to this view of their opportunities and bring such exceptional trustees to their service, or inspire with new vision those they now have. Addressed here are the opportunities for seminaries. Elsewhere (chapter VI of *Servant Leadership*) I have discussed the opportunities available to foundations.

In the three essays that follow I note that the perspective from which I approach the subject of seminaries and their missions is that of a student of organization, how things get done, not as a theologian or scholar. Included in my perspective is a long time immersion in the writings of Machiavelli. It is my view that, while manifestations differ, joustings among contemporary power seekers (of whom there are plenty) are little different in their essentials from what they were in sixteenth century Florence. Since I am now retired and no longer in the fray, I turn to Machiavelli periodically as a means for keeping myself refreshed about the nature of the society in which we all live and do our work. I find no other commentator, ancient or contemporary, who is as clear, realistic, or insightful on the use of power in society as Machiavelli. Also I find in his writing much wisdom that is useful to a person or institution that would be a servant in our time.

Against the dismal view of human nature that one gets from reading Machiavelli, I place the religion of hope (religion again used in its root meaning of rebind). I could not read this coldly realistic Florentine, and keep my sanity in this chaotic world, unless I had hope. Not hope that some miraculous intervention will banish evil so that good will prevail. I am not sure that I would be happy in such an aseptic place. My expectations are really modest: that a few able people who think of themselves as "good" will become more dedicated servants of society and will work

a little harder and more astutely at it than some who think of themselves as "good" are now accustomed.

My short run hope is that some of these able good people will become trustees of seminaries and do what only inspired trustees are likely to do: work to give their seminary a vision of greatness that will lift it clearly out of the bureaucratic mold that engulfs so many institutions and set it on a course that will assure that it becomes the influential force that its top-of-the-hierarchy position makes possible.

My long run hope — as expressed in the essay on MISSION — is that, as the result of seminaries establishing their claim to this position, institutions whose primary motive is caring for persons and are governed by persuasion will rise to dominance in the culture over those that seem now to dominate: institutions that are governed by coercion and whose primary motive is private gain and survival in the competitive struggle.

It may be said that the quality of contemporary society is determined by the quality, as separate entities, of the legions of institutions that comprise it. The seminary will be an effective force in this composite as it wields its influence, through the churches, on both individuals and the institutions which they both govern and are governed by.

These three essays, addressed to seminary trustees, are made available for wider distribution because I feel they may be of some interest to those who share my concern for the quality of institutions generally. Further, one who is trustee of a quite different institution from a seminary may be stimulated to produce insights of immediate relevance to one's primary trustee obligation. Then, from my perspective, all institutions are drawing closer together when judged by the challenges they present to their trustees and directors. In the interest of furthering discussion of areas of common ground, these three essays on seminaries and their trustees and chairpersons are offered to all trustees and directors of institutions of all kinds.

The three essays, while having different emphases, are not three distinct chapters. They are three discussions of the same subject written a year or two apart. The second and third reflect growth in thinking after the first. They are offered now, not as a definitive treatise on either seminaries or trusteeship but rather as a sharing of introspection on what I believe is common interest with the reader: where can one best put one's effort to build a better society? I see a "good" society as one in which there is widespread *faith as trust*, a quality that encourages people

to become constructive influences in the world as it is — violent, striving, unjust as well as beautiful, caring, and supportive.

Caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is, in my judgment, what makes a good society. Of all the institutions I know about, I would put the most stringent test of caring on seminaries because I believe that they hold, potentially, through the churches, the greatest leverage to influence the caring, serving quality of the whole society.

These chapters are offered in the hope that they will encourage trustees of just one seminary to give leadership to theologians who will generate seminal ideas about how our low-caring society might do better, who see things whole; and who have the gift of language so they can tell ordinary mortals what they think and see — folk who, by what they do or refrain from doing, make or break the society.

The Seminary as an Institution

I VENTURE TO DISCUSS the seminary as an institution, not as a theologian, but as a student of organization — how things get done. I hope that what I have to say from this perspective will be of interest to all constituencies of seminaries, but my primary concern is to speak to trustees, particularly the chairpersons of trustees, who may not have been trained in a seminary. It may be helpful if I share how I came by my interest in organization, and what leads me to a special concern for seminaries.

Up to twenty years ago most of my concern about organization was directed toward one large business where I had my major career: American Telephone and Telegraph Company. In my later years there I held the position of Director of Management Research. With the help of a professional staff, and within a broad charter, I was both involved and detached so that I could study and advise regarding the management of this huge institution (over one million employees) immersed as it is in sophisticated technology, elaborate human organization, and regulated public service. I was concerned, among other things, with its values, its history and myth, and, intimately with its top leadership. I learned the hard way about the profound influence that history, and the myths of institutions that have a considerable history, have on values, goals, and leadership. And I was painfully aware of the cost in those terms of any insensitivity to history and myth — especially among the top officers.

This experience at AT&T gave me a good perspective and the impetus to venture, in my retirement years, into a close working relationship with a wide range of institutions: universities (especially in the turbulent sixties); foundations (both as trustee, consultant, and staff member); churches (both local, regional, and national) and church related institutions; professional associations, and businesses — in the U.S., in Europe, and in the Third World. This brought me, in time, to a realization of the crucial role of trustees in the performance of any institution, anywhere, and the strategic leadership opportunity in the position of chairperson. This led to writing a monograph on Trustees as Servants (now available as Chapter III in *Servant Leadership*, Paulist Press, 1977).

In my later years as I have had more time for reflecting and writing, and as I have become more aware of the fragile nature of our whole society, I have asked myself the question, where, in the vast range of institutions that serve us, is there the greatest unrealized potential — potential for constructive influence on the whole society? My answer is, of course, a subjective judgment, but I have concluded: *seminaries*, seminaries of all faiths, particularly in our country. Simply in terms of the prudent use of resources, I believe that more can be done to raise the quality of our total society than in any other one way, *if* seminaries of all faiths could move closer to their full potential as servants. (The word *servant* has special significance to me; but rather than attempt to define it explicitly at this point, I would prefer that the meaning that word has for me be permitted to evolve as one reads further in this memorandum.)

I have had a fairly long contact with seminaries because, in my AT&T role of concern for values of that institution, I sought a relationship with professors of ethics in Protestant, Catholic and Jewish seminaries. Some of these developed into lasting friendships which endure to this day. I invited some of these professors to meet with my AT&T colleagues, and I arranged for them to lecture in programs for executives. My relationship with them was close enough to permit me to have an insider's view in several seminaries. Then, later, I served six years on the Visiting Committee at Harvard Divinity School. More recently, I have read some of the history of seminaries, and have talked with historians about the implications of this history.

Even without this involvement with seminaries, out of work with churches and church institutions and my later introspection about the

structure of society, I believe that I would have come to my present view regarding the crucial role available to seminaries. I hold this view because of the strategic space seminaries seem to me to occupy, or could occupy, in the hierarchy of institutions in which seminaries have the opportunity to give sustaining support to churches, and churches, in turn, can give religious nurture and moral guidance to individuals directly and support (as conservers of traditions and advocates of values) the whole gamut of "operating" institutions: governments, schools, businesses, hospitals, social agencies, philanthropies, families, communities. The strength and durability of our democratic institutions rest on the wide acceptance and practice of a common moral code. And I see the seminaries as having the potential to hold the prime position of supporting the churches as they work to foster religious concern and to strengthen the moral basis of society.

When I say that seminaries have the opportunity to give sustaining support to churches I mean much more than training their pastors, important as that service is. I see the opportunity for the seminary to stand as a constant source of intellectual rigor and prophetic vision, of spiritual energy, and as the support and inspiration for strong leadership and society-shaping influence in the churches. One of the simple truths that survives from my business experience is that it is possible for able conceptual leadership in a central staff to sustain exceptional performance in an almost unlimited number of local operating units which, on their own, would be quite ordinary. Further, in my experience, this exceptional performance is best achieved by persuasive conceptual leadership, without coercion or authority. At the core of this unusual business is an assembly in basic science that has been called the closest thing to a university outside the university, and that has produced, in its time, seven Nobel Laureates. This, I believe, is the source of the strong conceptual leadership that I experienced. If a business can make this principle viable, a seminary also has the opportunity to do it — and better. *Please note that I have said only that the seminary has the opportunity, because of its place in the hierarchy of institutions, to give this leadership. If it is to exploit this opportunity, it must generate sufficient leadership power — with its own resources.* (Foundations have a similar opportunity, largely unexploited, to serve colleges and universities.)

As I see churches today — churches of all faiths — they are struggling to shore up a deteriorating society without much sustaining support —

from seminaries, or, with few exceptions, from anywhere else. This brings me to the observation that seminaries (from the perspective of a student of organization), in general and as they now stand, are marginal institutions. They are judged marginal because, in our highly institutionalized society, they do not carry the weight of influence and leadership that their place in the scheme of things makes possible. I sense that they are marginal in their own self-image, in the eyes of their principal constituency, the churches, and in the public view. While seminaries perform an acknowledged necessary function, the training of pastors, they do not generally provide the sustaining support and prophetic leadership for churches, for which they are correctly positioned and of which I believe they are potentially capable. The gap between seminaries and churches is not likely to be healed by a reach from the churches. The initiative rests with seminaries.

In saying these things I am not suggesting for seminaries an unrealistic utopian achievement. What is reasonable and possible with available resources, human and material, is the standard I would apply. I would like to see all seminaries, seminaries of all faiths, reach from where they now are to attain much more of the reasonable and possible — each seminary with its own resources and within its own vision of what it ought to do and to be. I am confident that any seminary that makes this reach, and thereby moves from the marginal stance toward a central and crucial role, will find a much more rewarding institutional existence than what many now enjoy. And I believe that the typical seminary can make this movement, over time, by a series of prudent steps; prudent, but not necessarily comfortable. Prudent, because each seminary will build from its own resources, human and material, with understanding and respect for, and within the vision defined by, its own history and myth. It will not be simple or easy, and it will be a major creative challenge. The first step for a seminary may be to accept that, next to survival, building leadership strength — to lead the churches — may be its first priority in these times.

Premise

Occasionally institutions of all categories (including seminaries) rise to the exceptional under the long term direction of an unusually able administrator. But, usually, when that administrator leaves, the institution lapses, in time, back to the ordinary. There are not enough of these

exceptional administrators around to fill all top administrative posts of all institutions with such persons. Even if, potentially, such gifted administrators were abundant, the common wisdom does not yet provide a way to bring them all into top positions. Able top administrators, with occasional exceptions, have always been, and probably always will be just ordinary good people. The challenge is how to bring an institution to exceptional performance with ordinary good people to administer and staff it. The premise here is that ordinary good people as trustees, and with such a person chairing the work, can do it — *if* they are sustained by a concept of greatness as their goal; greatness as servants of society — in the case of a seminary, greatness in service to churches and through churches to society. What kind of belief builds confidence in this premise?

For one who grew up in the Christian tradition as I did, the roots, of course, are Biblical. " — whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave —" (Matthew 20: 26 and 27). The choice of the word "slave" for the one who would be first suggests that the trustee chairperson will have an unusual dedication and caring concern.

My own personal credo is stated thus:

I believe that caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is what makes a good society. Most caring was once person to person. Now much of it is mediated through institutions — often large, powerful, impersonal, not always competent, sometimes corrupt. If a better society is to be built, one more just and more loving and providing opportunity for people to grow, the most open way (and the most effective and economical course, while supportive of the social order) is to raise the performance as servant of as many institutions as possible by voluntary regenerative actions initiated within them by committed individuals: *servants*.

Part of the human dilemma in our times is that there is little in our Biblical tradition, or anywhere else, that suggests what makes a servant — or a serving institution — in our highly institutionalized society. There is evidence that ours is a low caring (poorly served) society, and concern for this condition has resulted in large scale actions by government (1) to provide money to alleviate suffering and correct injustice, and (2) to give rewards and penalties to compel both individuals and institutions to behave in more socially constructive ways. In an imperfect

world, some of these actions will always be needed. But compulsion is of limited use except to restrain destructive behavior and encourage conforming acts, and money does little other than cushion suffering and injustice. Neither compulsion nor money has much utility in causing institutions to be reconstructed as more caring and more serving. Only the voluntary actions of people inside an institution can accomplish this.

There is a stirring within some institutions today to improve their serving qualities. But this seems to be mostly exhortation or tinkering with procedures, "gimmicks!". Much of it is a sort of "aspirin" treatment that produces a short-lived easing of the pain, but little fundamental change may result from it. However, these efforts have produced a burgeoning literature. The occasional institution that achieves high servant stature under the direction of a gifted administrator who has such a goal is usually conspicuous by the absence of the common "gimmicks" (such as those that are promoted under such labels as "Management by Objectives", "Planned Program Budgeting", etc.). A strong healthy institution, as with a person, is not built by the aspirin treatment.

I cite these conditions not to pronounce a jeremiad on our society (although such may be warranted). Rather I simply contend that there is little to date in our collective experience with institutions that trustees of a seminary may draw on as they seek to raise their seminary to greater servant stature. If the assumption of the hierarchical arrangement (seminaries to churches, and from churches to individuals and to operating institutions) is a valid one, it may be that other institutions will follow, rather than set models for, seminaries. How to produce an exceptional serving institution with ordinary good people to staff and lead it is the goal. If a few seminaries can demonstrate how, other institutions may be encouraged to try.

How To Do It

If, as has been suggested, seminaries have the opportunity to provide strong leadership to churches, and churches, in turn, can provide it to both individuals and to the many operating institutions, then, in concept and vision, a seminary needs to be wholly self-regenerating. No other institution stands as an available resource for seminaries. This means that a seminary, of all institutions, needs the caring support of able and dedicated trustees who are led by an unusually strong chairper-

son. And these trustees will need to find their own way to a constructive role in helping to move the particular seminary from marginal status toward its optimum as a servant of the churches — and society. The question is, how to do it?

The answer to this question will need to be discovered for each seminary, for itself. Most seminaries have considerable history. There are doctrinal differences between schools and within faculties. Their faculties and administrators are unique individuals, they vary in age and adaptability, and most have quite firm, and probably differing positions regarding what a seminary ought to be. Financial resources differ. There are widely varying patterns of relationship to constituencies. All of these aspects combine to give the particular seminary its individual character, and the critical aspects need to be taken into account by trustees who wish to give the seminary new leadership. If trustees are to give new leadership, one generalization is risked: New seminary leadership from trustees is not likely to be asked for by faculty or administrators; nor is the overt offering of such leadership apt to be welcomed. But, then, rarely is leadership asked for or welcomed in any situation short of a condition of overwhelming confusion or imminent disaster. *Leadership* is one of the most talked about and least understood ideas in contemporary discussions. At its best, leadership is a subtle process. As the ancient Taoist proclaimed: "When the leader leads well, the people will say, 'we did it ourselves!' " Leadership needs to be offered, and, if effective, it is voluntarily accepted.

Trustees of a seminary who choose to assert constructive leadership are confronted with an anomaly: they are charged by law with *managing* the institution, and they stand in the position of ultimate responsibility. They possess coercive power, and all who hold coercive power find their ability to lead is clouded by that fact, because leadership rests mostly on persuasion and the responses to it are voluntary, not coerced. And when any person who holds coercive power attempts to lead, there is apt to be the unasked question "Where is the hidden agenda?" Further, while trustees hold legal power, faculties, by long tradition, have evolved a de facto power that is probably more potent. Evidence of the effectiveness of new constructive leadership by trustees may be the emergence of new transforming leadership among faculty and administrators, and *this* is the leadership that will move the seminary from a marginal to a central or crucial role.

What can be said at this point, in advance of experience to confirm the above assertions, about the distinguishing characteristics of constructive trustee leadership in a seminary?

Constructive Trustee Leadership

Constructive trustee leadership begins with continuing to do well what trustees generally do now, such as: serve as legal cover and public image builder for the institution, raise money, authorize and audit the use of money, render gratis consulting services, take those actions required by the charter and by-laws, appoint or dismiss administrative officers, and stand as the court of last resort if internal administration and staff reach an impasse. These are all useful services that help keep the institution viable, but they are maintenance functions; they do not constitute *leadership*, in the commonly accepted meaning of *lead*, to go out ahead to show the way.

Parallel with these usual activities, and perhaps independently, trustees will start the search for the most constructive leadership role for themselves, for *this* seminary, and in these times. What is sought, it is hoped, is a prudent evolutionary movement that is congruent with the seminary's development up to now. What might be the direction of this movement?

The idea of trusteeship goes back to the person who was entrusted to manage the affairs of another. The concept of a governing board of trustees of an institution is relatively new because the vast structure of institutions that serve us now is rather recent — in the last 200 years, with much of it in this century. Two hundred years ago there were governments, armies, churches, and a few universities. But the common lot was life in families and simple communities with most people partly or wholly self-sustaining with the support of modest commerce. To the extent that lives were guided by a theology, it was a theology of persons.

The American constitution makes no mention of the common form of institution, the corporation, because they scarcely existed when our constitution was written. Corporations get their legal status because of the willingness of the courts to construe them as persons. Likewise, our available theology usually turns out to be a theology of persons and there is little to turn to in our theological resources for guidance as to how institutions can be brought under the shelter of theology — and thereby be made more humane and more serving. If one views *all* institu-

tions, large or small, as I do: as intricate webs of fallible humans groping for meaning, order, and light — then, at the core, the problem of all institutions is, has always been, theological. Seminary trustees who seek a more constructive leadership role may find that the best basis for eliciting a new transforming leadership from faculty and administrators will be to start the deliberations leading to a new theology of institutions which the seminary, with the involvement of all of its constituencies, will labor to bring forth, and with the seminary's own institutional development as the laboratory.

The terms "theology of persons" and "theology of institutions" are not in common parlance. They are used here to suggest that, to a nontheologian like the writer of this memorandum who is concerned about the crucial role that seminaries could carry, there is a question about the adequacy of the theological resources of seminaries to support churches so that churches can be of greater help to legions of people who are immersed in the mass of institutions that make up contemporary society. Trustees may want to raise the question, "Are the theological resources of the seminary — whatever they are — adequate for this particular support?" Whatever the answer is, there is an opening for dialogue between trustees and faculty and administrators on what may prove to be one of the more important issues of the late 20th century — important for seminaries, for churches, for all of us.

If a seminary trustee is, as I am, a nontheologian, she or he will venture with caution in raising a question about the adequacy of theology. Yet, as a trustee, the issue must be faced — just as a layman who is trustee of a hospital must be prepared to question the practice of medicine, or the lay trustee of a university must be prepared to question the process of education.

The adequacy of any theology is tested, ultimately, by examining what it produces in the lives of people who have its implications interpreted for them through the mediation of churches. The issue of the adequacy of the available theology of institutions is an appropriate concern for seminary trustees who are searching for their most constructive role because *this* theology addresses both institutions in general and *this* seminary as an institution, in particular.

It is an interesting question. Anyone can make a contribution to theology; but established theologians are best positioned to originate and advocate a new theology of institutions — *and be heard*. However,

nontheologians who are keeping a close watch on our institutions will make the ultimate judgment on the adequacy of that theology. One test they will apply is: what comes through to trustees and directors of institutions of all sorts, for profit or not for profit, that induces them to take and sustain initiatives that result in the institutions they hold in trust becoming substantially more serving than most now are to all the persons they touch? Other nontheologians will make other tests of the adequacy of other theologies — in terms of their ultimate consequences in the lives of people.

Constructive trustees of any institution will listen carefully to those who make the ultimate tests of adequacy of that institution's service. What makes seminary trusteeship especially interesting and challenging is that the seminary has the potential for influencing such a wide gamut of human affairs.

Preparation for Trusteeship

How can seminary trustees initiate the move toward a more constructive role — for themselves, and give the new leadership that helps bring the seminary to optimal strength as a servant of society?

They might first seek to clarify for themselves, and for all constituencies, what the history and myth of their particular seminary is, and they may find much of it is not written and that no single person knows it all. (*Myth* is used in the sense of a story that relates historical events and that serves to explain some practice or belief.)

Then they might gather and study the literature on seminaries in general, which is considerable, and of varying quality, and encourage other constituencies to do the same. There have been studies, some recent, by individuals and groups that raise the issues about seminary purpose and the content and method of theological education.

Trustees, particularly their chairperson, will need to take the time to meet and discuss with faculty, administrators, students, alumni, church representatives, and denominational officers — if it is a denominational seminary. Trustees might attend faculty meetings, student assemblies, and occasional classes in rotation — all if invited. Also they could meet with students in small groups where issues in the seminary are being discussed. While this work may be shared, seminary trustees will do well to accept at the outset that their role with this unique kind of institution will make a large claim on their time.

Out of these discussions the trustees will discover that seminaries, in the course of their history, took on the values of universities, and that their faculties tended to assume the characteristic university position, "the faculty *is* the university". This position in both university and seminary may have come about by default. No one else, trustees for instance, concerned themselves with defining the institution, so faculties, with their large career stake, defined it as themselves. The first concern of seminary trustees in search of a new leadership role may be to search for the idea, the unifying vision, that will define the seminary.

Conceptual leadership by trustees may best be manifested by questions. The trustee is the asker, not the answerer of questions. *Whom and what purpose should this seminary serve?* This may be the prime question to be asked of all constituencies of the seminary. The faculty contribution to answering that question will be very important, but not the only source. Gradually, faculties may be led to accept the *servant* role: that their best part is to serve whatever purpose evolves from the deliberate search conducted by trustees, a search in which they have had a major but not exclusive role.

I suggest that the key to greatness, in a seminary or in any other institution, is the quality of the dream, the vision, and the primacy of that dream as the ultimate government. Every person, every constituency, stands subordinate to the dream. Helping the dream to evolve and nurturing it is the first consideration in trusteeship.

Trustees, in giving leadership, should be ever mindful of the sensitivity of faculty members to the faculty role in governance and of their apprehension about the trustees' use of their power. Faculty will be concerned that trustees have a sufficient understanding, in depth, of the faculty's perception of the nature of a seminary.

Seminary trustees might also be aware, as they pursue the search for the answer to the question of purpose, that they will never answer it, definitively, or for all time. Yet, at any one time, the seminary should be proceeding with assurance to serve a clearly identified constituency with a firm purpose in mind. Part of the art of trusteeship is to maintain a balance between *order and stability* and *search*. Search, for any institution or any person, should never end. Balance between the two is important, because, in any institution, there is an optimum tension between order and search. Either too little or too much such tension is destructive. Further, except for the rare seminary that has funds at its disposal

to engage new staff for new programs, trustees will acknowledge that their seminary can only undertake what they, the trustees, can persuade the existing faculty to accept.

Once a workable answer, for the present, has been achieved for the question, *Whom and what purpose shall this seminary serve?* the next question for trustee concern might be: *What shall be the content of the teaching and how shall it be taught?* Here, again, the trustee is the asker, not the answerer of the question. The aim is to find the best possible curriculum and method to implement the goal established in answer to the first question. Again, faculty opinion will be important, but not necessarily governing. And, again, unless there is money for new staff, the seminary can only undertake what the trustees can persuade the existing faculty to accept *and learn to do.* Two further questions may be asked by trustees: *How can the seminary best support chuches? How can the seminary be a constant source of prophetic vision?*

When Karl Marx sat alone in the British Museum evolving the theories that would shape so much of the 20th century world, was he not filling a void that resulted from the failure of the churches of his day to come forth with a new prophetic vision that the conditions of the industrial revolution made imperative? But Marx apparently did not foresee the institution-bound society that was evolving as he wrote. And Marxist nations, today, are plagued with the same problem we are: how to make their complex institutions more serving. Thus there is now another void, world-wide — a crisis of institutional leadership. Who will produce a new vision to fill *this* void?

Thoughtful people today are complaining about ours being a "media-dominated" culture, to our detriment. Could it be that, in the absence of an adequate theology of institutions, the media are simply filling the void?

This question helps define the opportunity for new trustee leadership in seminaries.

Persuasion — Prime Art of Trustee Leadership

Trustees, if they are to lead constructively, will understand the meaning of, and be gifted in, the art of *persuasion.*

One is persuaded, I believe, on arrival at a feeling of rightness about a belief or action through one's own intuitive sense — perhaps checked by another's intuitive sense but, in the end, one's own intuitive feeling will

govern. One takes an intuitive step from the closest approximation to certainty to be reached by conscious logic (sometimes not very close) to that state in which one may say with conviction, "This is where I stand." The act of persuasion will help order the logic and favor the intuitive step. And this takes time! But the one being persuaded must take that intuitive step alone, untrammeled by coercion or manipulative strategems. Both leader and follower respect the integrity and allow the autonomy of the other; and each allows and encourages the other to find his or her own intuitive confirmation of the rightness of the belief or action.

If persuasion is ever to rise over coercion and manipulation as the prevailing modus operandi in our violence-prone society, then the clear model of an institution that is led by persuasion alone needs to emerge in the most influential spot possible. I believe that some seminaries have the potential to occupy that spot — to be influential models for other institutions, *to be the civilizing models!*

In summary, trustees have the opportunity, by astute and persistent questioning and persuasive leadership, to encourage the seminary to: (1) *Evolve an adequate theology of institutions for these times.* (2) *Define in contemporary terms whom and what purpose this seminary can best serve.* (3) *Find the best curriculum and method to serve those people and that purpose.* (4) *Give effective support to churches in the full scope of their missions.* And (5) *Become significant sources of prophetic vision, places that are looked to for guidance and light.* A seminary that can achieve these through its existing staff and with its present resources will become a model for the regeneration of all kinds of institutions.

Glittering innovations can always be produced by new people and new money. How can we do better with the people and the money we now have? This is the urgent plea of so many who would become constructive trustees or directors of the all-too-many low-serving institutions of our times.

What guidelines might be useful to the seminary chairperson who would like to make the first move — to do better, much better, with the money and the people the seminary now has?

The Chairperson

All leadership positions are to some extent lonely posts. The chairperson of seminary trustees is no exception. Even if, among fellow trustees,

there are close friends, some detachment is required. One's leadership strategy, whatever it is, should involve one with all trustees on the same terms. While there will be occasional conversations with individual trustees, there should be no grounds for suspicion that some trustee responses are prearranged. I know this contradicts the perception of some experienced trustees; but I am postulating here some conditions for a level of trustee performance that most have not experienced. The chairperson's role *should* be a lonely one. The trustee is what the title implies, the bearer of trust. And the chairperson, if well chosen, stands tall among colleagues in this dimension.

If the above is a reasonable assumption, and if the chairperson of a seminary wants to give leadership to trustees who will have a chance of being the constructive influence described earlier, then a confidant or coach for the chairperson should be sought. This should be someone who is completely uninvolved in the seminary. Every person who carries a difficult or sensitive role needs a confidant or coach. The administrators of the seminary may need such help. But the need of the chairperson is perhaps the most difficult to serve.

In choosing to relate to a confidant or coach, the chairperson is acknowledging that if the seminary is to move toward its higher potential as a servant of society, the one who occupies the chair must be the first to become a learner. But since there is no clear body of knowledge about how to chair effectively, the one who occupies that spot must evolve the strategy for giving new leadership out of one's own experience through interaction with a coach.

All trustees should, as individuals or through committee participation, have some firsthand relations with all constituencies — especially faculty and students. There should be sufficient interaction so that, in their official deliberations, trustees have an experiential basis for good intuitive judgment on matters of trustee concern. The chairperson should have, in addition, a close relationship to administrators so that there is encouragement for dynamic leadership by all administrators. Also, the chairperson will want to help other trustees gain perspective for their evaluative judgment about administrative performance. This is a subtle process; to be close enough to administrative action to be helpful and encouraging, and to be critical and evaluative, but still to be detached enough so that administrators have sufficient scope for initiative and creativity to carry their roles with spirit. The chairperson

should instruct the coach and confidant to be particularly watchful over this relationship between the chairperson and administrators.

All trustees should participate in evaluating administrators. But the chairperson should be prepared to provide more extensive data about administrators than any other trustee is likely to have.

The chairperson also has the obligation to build respect for trustee judgments among all constituencies. Trustees, by law, have the power to govern. But like all such power, its value is inverse to the extent of its use. It is important that the power be there, but *influence*, growing out of respect for trustee judgments, is the critical trustee asset. The chairperson, in consultation with the coach-confidant, should develop a clear strategy for building and sustaining trustee influence. This influence will depend on the evident trustworthiness of trustees as demonstrated by: (1) The quality of greatness of the dream that evolves for the seminary and what it might become as a servant of society. (2) The dedication of trustees in terms of their investment of time and their caring for people — all of the people in the seminary. (3) The adequacy of their information about the seminary. (4) Their ability and disposition to persuade. And (5) adherence to collegiality and careful group process in reaching their judgments — a process that is understood by all constituencies.

Trustworthiness, in the above terms, augurs for confidence in trustee judgments by all who are asked to accept them. The chairperson will be aware of elements like these that build trust, and will be watchful and diligent to encourage their optimum manifestation among seminary trustees. This, it seems to me, is the essence of leadership from the chair.

Not all persons who have a talent for leadership are effective in all situations at all times. If the seminary chairperson finds, after a reasonable time, that his or her leadership is not adequate for this institution at this time, then they should quietly step aside so that someone else can try. Every seminary, every institution, deserves an effective leader in their chairperson — all of the time.

Summary Comment

Three words are commonly used in reference to the oversight of an institution: *manage*, *administer*, and *lead*. Manage (from manus, hand) connotes control. *Administer* (from administrare, to serve) has the sense of care for. These two, manage and administer, may be seen as the

maintenance functions, terribly important but concerned mostly with conservation and perpetuation.

Lead is a word of less certain origin. Whereas management and administration usually derive from delegated authority from trustees, *leading*, in the commonly accepted meaning of going out ahead to show the way, can be undertaken by anybody. The only test of leadership is that somebody follows. Following, as distinguished from compliance, is voluntary. Thus *strong* leadership can bring unity and clarity of purpose and uncertain leadership can bring disorder and chaos. The latter was conspicuous in the university world, including some seminaries, in the late sixties.

Those who manage or administer in a seminary can also lead — and most do some leading. But consider the five basic questions cited above. *Are the theological resources of the seminary adequate? Whom and what purpose does the seminary serve? What should be the content and teaching method of the seminary? How best to serve the churches? How can the seminary be a constant source of prophetic vision?* These are questions that are best dealt with if there is at least supporting leadership from trustees. Trustees, in their more detached position, can afford to be persistent questioners and visionaries. Administrators, to whom have been delegated the essential maintenance functions, may find that if they undertake this type of leadership alone, it interferes with administrative obligations. Faculty may more readily respond, with transforming leadership of their own, to a trustee initiative than to some administrative initiatives. If trustees will take the risk of leadership toward a larger dream for the seminary, they may do it in a nonconfrontational persuasive way that elicits supportive leadership from other constituencies. Administrators may best give supporting leadership on some matters, if trustees will lead by questioning and persuading.

If a seminary is to move toward its full potential as harborer and nurturer of prophetic voices that give vision and hope, what is needed first is leadership that wants to take the risk of such a larger dream. And it is a risk. All leadership is nurturing and risking. Trustees and their chairperson are more expendable than able administrators. And some of the risks of leadership of a seminary, or any other institution, are best taken by trustees — partly because they can better tolerate the risk, partly because they are better positioned to assume some aspects of leadership.

Leadership does not "belong" to anybody, nor can it be bestowed on anybody. If trustees want to lead, they will need to build a role for themselves, including earning the trust that makes it possible. One of the contributions seminary trustees can make to our evolving society is to build the trustee role so as to make of the seminary a distinctive institution, a model for others.

Some respond to the thrust of this memorandum with these reservations: the hope expressed here for the role of seminaries is too idealistic; trustees are not available who will invest the time required; the money raising role of the trustees has not been mentioned — most seminaries are poor; and the usual chairperson does not have the leadership skills that the role, as described in this memorandum, calls for.

Too Idealistic. What, in the end, will be judged too idealistic is that which is not achieved when the limits of the reasonable and possible with available resources, human and material, are reached. Most institutions I know about, including some seminaries, are so far from pressing the limits of the reasonable and the possible that the charge "too idealistic" has little force. The goals suggested here may be flawed on other grounds, but not on that one.

Not Enough Time. Most able people find the time to do the things that give them joy. In my experience with trustees, whether as participant or observer, I have found some of the proceedings so dull and unrewarding that only a strong sense of duty, a feeling of guilt, or a desire for the prestige of the office would hold a person to it. But the joy of creative achievement will elicit the investment of time — and care — that the full measure of trusteeship requires.

Who Will Raise The Money? How can trustees be expected to raise money when, in the usual seminary, they have only a maintenance role? Give them the kind of role described here and they will *want* to raise money; not out of a sense of guilt or duty, which are not very good motives, but because they understand and believe in what the seminary is about. It is a matter of vital concern to them because they have given decisive leadership in bringing the seminary for the twenty-first century into being.

Inadequate Leadership Skills. Granted; the usual chairperson may not have developed the skills of leadership that the trusteeship function

described here requires. Even though the incumbent may be potentially capable of acquiring those skills, they are not likely to emerge at a high level of accomplishment because they are not expected. The almost universally accepted casual performance of trustees in all sorts of institutions assures that the full maturing of these skills will be rare. Since leadership is a prime concern in the churches, should it not be a central issue in seminaries, both its theological implications and its sensitive practice?

Let me restate my personal credo:

I believe that caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is what makes a good society. Most caring was once person to person. Now much of it is mediated through institutions — often large, powerful, impersonal, not always competent, sometimes corrupt. If a better society is to be built, one more just and more loving and providing opportunity for people to grow, the most open way (and the most effective and economical course, while supportive of the social order) is to raise the performance as servant of as many institutions as possible by voluntary regenerative actions initiated within them by committed individuals: *servants*.

Elsewhere I have written, "Too much of the effort to care and serve is directed to easing the hurt of the 'system' that is grinding people down faster than the most valiant rescue effort can help them; and too little caring effort is going into rebuilding the 'system' (institutions) that will give greater assurance that those being served grow as persons; *while being served*, they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants".

If the *performance as servant* of as many as possible of our institutions is to be raised (a necessary condition, as I see it, if ours is to become a more caring society), then somewhere there must be an initiative that starts the movement toward this end. If my premise regarding the hierarchy of institutions — seminaries to churches to individuals and operating institutions — is a valid one, then seminaries are best positioned to take this initiative.

Whoever takes this initiative (and I hope it will be seminaries) will accept the challenge to bring into being a new teachable art of chairing — beginning with the chairperson of the seminary itself.

Then, drawing on its own experience, the seminary may find that it is in possession of the stuff for a prophetic vision for these times.

This is my hope for the seminary as an institution.

"What is now proved was once only imagin'd" — William Blake

Mission in a Seminary

ONE OF THE EASIEST to ask and hardest to answer of all questions is, *What are you trying to do?*

It is hard enough for an individual to answer that question. But it is much more difficult for an institution to answer, and most difficult of all for an eleemosynary institution that has both the momentum of tradition and the support of sentiment to sustain it. There is always the possibility (and the temptation to hope) that enough sentimental support can be stirred so that the tough question can be avoided: *What are you trying to do?*

This essay explores the problem of dealing with this question of "What are you trying to do?" by trustees of a seminary, with particular reference to the strategic position that seminaries occupy in the culture and the great, but largely unrealized, potential influence in that position.

Who Dominates the Culture?

From my perspective, ours is a business dominated culture. The business influence is there, not so much because of the magnitude of the business presence, nor because businesses are more committed than others to serve society, but because the missions of businesses are usually better defined than in other institutions. And they get that way partly because business executives usually have more coercive power to govern

than do executives in eleemosyaries, partly because the pursuit of private gain and the need to survive in the competitive struggle require that missions be clear and forceful.

I am writing this essay because I believe that dominance of the culture by elements like coercive power, private gain, and survival in the competitive struggle do not make for the quality of society that is reasonable and possible with the resources we have. Criticism of business and restraining its influence by government will not, in my judgment, produce the quality of society that is realistically possible. What will build a better society, I believe, and what is well within our resources to do, is to bring to dominance in the culture those institutions whose primary motive is caring for persons and that are governed by persuasion. My hope is that, in time, such predominance will wield a meliorating influence on the harshness of both business and government. A necessary first step is a statement of mission for all eleemosynary institutions that is clear and powerful and that puts a high priority on the contribution of each institution to the quality of society because of what it is, what it does, and how it is governed. In my view, the best placed institutions to initiate a definition of their missions in these terms are seminaries and foundations. This essay will be concerned with seminaries.

The test that I would put on the adequacy of a seminary statement of mission is: What does it promise to contribute, through leadership of and service to churches, to building and sustaining a good society? A good society, as I see it, is one in which there is widespread *faith as trust*, a quality that can encourage large numbers to become constructive influences in the world as it is — violent, striving, unjust as well as beautiful, caring, and supportive. Others might postulate other tests, but this one suggests the premise on which this essay is based.

This essay on *Mission in a Seminary, A Prime Concern for Trustees* is a sequal to *The Seminary as an Institution* (Lilly Endowment 1980). In the earlier essay I noted the basis for my concern for seminaries and suggested that I saw them at the top of the hierarchy of institutions (along with foundations) in which seminaries have the opportunity to give sustaining support to churches, and churches, in turn, can give religious nurture and moral guidance to individuals and support, as conservers of tradition and advocates of values, the whole gamut of

"operating" institutions: governments, schools, businesses, hospitals, social agencies, philanthropies, families, communities.

Statements of mission in a seminary, in addition to giving clear guidance to informed constituencies, also need to be persuasive to people unversed in the technical language of theology, particularly to those who fund seminaries. If contemporary seminaries were all adequately funded, if churches were receiving the sustaining leadership they should have from seminaries, and if seminaries attracted the students they should have in order to provide churches with able professional leadership, I could not make a case for the need for new statements of mission for seminaries. But the need, as I see it, is urgent on all three counts.

In addressing the subject of *Mission in a Seminary* I have a concern for two pervasive social problems: widespread alienation in all strata of the population and the inability or unwillingness to serve of far too many of the institutions that make up our complex society. Each of these problems may be a contributing cause to the other and neither is likely to be healed without coming to terms with the other.

Whom and What Purpose Shall this Seminary Serve?

In the earlier essay, *The Seminary as an Institution*, I suggested that the first question from trustees who want to be effective in their roles is: Whom and what purpose shall this seminary serve? This could be the first question that the trustees of any institution might ask because the answer to it defines the mission. If this question is asked of all constituencies of the seminary, and if trustees work patiently and sensitively for consensus, a mission may be defined that not only helps finance the place and brings the students the seminary should have, but it becomes a vital element of the ultimate government of the seminary — by guiding and assuring those who govern — thereby adding greatly to its strength as an institution.

Every person in whatever relationship, whether administrator, faculty, student, or staff is the *servant of the mission*. All have appropriate and clearly defined roles as servants of the mission. Every significant policy or decision, every act of teaching, the formation of every influence from or to any constituency is made with reference to that mission. There will be problems, of course, but clarity and power in the statement of mission will help resolve them. While primary power

in the seminary is lodged in the commonly acknowledged mission, people in the seminary — administrators, faculty, and students — also have power, but that power is subordinate to the governing idea. When the mission is clear and compelling, people in the seminary do not ask (as I heard them in one instance) "who has the power?" The seminary in which the power of the mission is primary stands among other institutions as a model in which issues are met in creative fashion with reference to "what does the mission require of us?"

In any institution (including seminaries) that is comprised of fallible humans it is important that the legal power to govern be clearly assigned. But the quality of the institution will be inverse to the use of that legal power.

What is Worthy of Survival?

One of my sharply etched memories from the now distant past is a view from my office window, high above the east bank of the Hudson River in lower New York with a commanding view of the harbor. Much of the busy river traffic was made up of tug boats with groups of barges in tow. This scene was most interesting, sometimes frightening, when the tide was running out, perhaps with some wind behind it, and a tug was taking its group of barges downstream. The problem for the tug, under these conditions, was to sustain enough pull on the cables to the barges to keep them in orderly movement toward their destination. Under these adverse conditions, any slackening of that tension could result in chaos.

The memory of those scenes on the river came vividly to mind in the 1960's when I watched at close range as several venerable universities lapsed into chaos and seriously damaged themselves. When destructive forces were unleashed (and such are always latent in any institution) the power of the sense of mission in the university, like the pull of the tug on its barges, was not enough to keep a guiding tension on the several constituencies of the university. The answer to the question, "What in the institution is worthy of survival?" was not clear. There was not enough power in the governing ideas.

If either is faced with potential chaos, there is a parallel between the position of the skipper of the tug and the executive of any institution. The power to prevent chaos does not reside with either. That power is in the *engine* of the tug and in the *mission* of the institution. An able

skipper or executive will better manage the chaos than inept ones and thus render it less damaging. But given sufficient adverse conditions and not enough power in engines or mission, neither executive nor skipper holds the power to prevent chaos! All they can do is to try to manage the chaos as best they can; but it is still chaos.

To the owner of the tug, I would say, "Don't dispatch that tug downstream when the tide is running out unless there is enough power in the engine to handle potential problems." To the trustees of any institution I would say, "Use what influence you have to get accepted a powerful governing idea (mission). If, after a reasonable effort, you conclude that you can't make it, find yourself something better to do. *It is a breach of trust to hold the position of trustee of any institution, and to acquiesce in an inadequate statement of mission.*"

A great contemporary idea of what a university should be doing would make a better university at any time — before, during or after the 1960's. Some university missions may have been inadequate for a long time, but in that critical period of testing, some were found to be inadequate — by the simple test that their missions at that time did not have the power to hold against the forces of chaos. There is much to be learned from those traumatic experiences. Has it been learned?

What is worthy of survival? *An institution with a great mission!* — particularly a seminary with a great mission.

Why is Mission Important in a Seminary?

It is important to avoid chaos because it wastes resources and hurts people. But that is but one of the benefits to be derived from a strong sense of mission in the seminary — or in any institution. Clear and powerful mission is important because it provides the substance of common purpose that all constituencies might be persuaded to accept. Once accepted, common purpose helps to heal, for all involved within the seminary, the pervasive alienation of our times; it helps keep priorities in order; it builds organizational esprit; it clearly signals who should and should not be in the seminary — as students, faculty, or staff as well as the qualities needed in the administration; it provides the basis for resolving, on a reasoned objective basis, the many issues that arise in the course of any institution's life with a minimum of reference to assigned power; and it provides the stimulus and direction for the

optimal performance of the seminary as the servant of all who are touched by its program.

These are qualities that are of great value to all institutions that have the potential to be influential — like seminaries — in order to assure a reasonably civilized society.

There are several ingredients of a healthy viable institution that mission alone will not provide: among these are, astute leadership and consistently able management. Machiavelli observed: "It is an infallible rule that a prince who is not wise himself cannot be well advised. . ."

Mission and Trustee Strategy

Most trustees that I know have some awareness of what is stated above. But they believe that a clear and compelling mission, a great governing idea, is best achieved by installing and supporting an able executive. Able executives are always important, and they should be supported, but I suggest that the executive, with rare exceptions, can only manage what is there. If the executive tries, alone, even with the assurance of support of trustees, to lead the seminary to the influential role that it might occupy, his or her tenure as the executive may be short. The rare executive may make it, but it is a gamble against unreasonable odds for a trustee to assume that the executive will make it *alone*. And there is damage to the institution when the executive tries to give this leadership *alone* and fails.

One of the distressing incidents of the recent past was the appointment of a few years ago of an able twenty-eight year old person as president of a college with the explicit charge from the trustees to give the place new leadership (which apparently was needed.) However, the trustees took no action on a statement of mission that would require that leadership, nor did they seek acceptance of the need for it from the several constituencies. The result: early resignation of the new president with damage to both the person and the college.

A prudent seminary trustee, one who would like to see a clear and compelling mission for the seminary, will accept that *it is the trustee's role to make the first move toward a clear definition of mission and secure wide acceptance of it, and then to support prudent efforts by the executive who endeavors to lead the seminary to achieve that mission.*

What would such trustee leadership comprise and where does the executive fit into it? In *The Seminary as an Institution* I suggested that

trustees are most effective as askers of questions, and that the first question might be, whom and what purpose shall this seminary serve? But this is an "umbrella" question and other more penetrating questions will need to be asked, questions that imply criteria that trustees may have in mind for evaluating answers from various constituencies.

The first requirement is a trustee chairperson who has an understanding of, and skill at achieving, consensus. If a seminary does not have someone in the chair who has that skill, and is willing to work long and patiently at using it, or if some other trustee will not endeavor to perform that function (in which case *that* trustee may effectively be the chairperson without benefit of title), that seminary will do well to make the best of its present role until it can find such a person to chair its trustees. Adequate mission, a widely accepted great governing idea, is not only unlikely to be achieved without that skill in the chair, but (as said above) the seminary may be damaged by trying to achieve it. I see the ability to find consensus as the prime skill in the art of chairing, both in defining mission and in presiding over the ongoing governance of the seminary as it works to fulfill that mission.

Trustees whose chairperson has this skill are in a position to pursue the question, whom and what purpose shall this seminary serve? I see six subsidiary questions that might be asked in such a way as to suggest the criteria by which trustees will judge the adequacy of the answers. These questions do not define wholly separate and discrete areas and, to some extent, they overlap. But they may suggest to trustees a basis for initiating a dialogue with the several constituencies of the seminary out of which a clear and powerful statement of mission may emerge.

1. **Does the Seminary See Itself as a Model for Other Institutions?**

Does the seminary accept its place at the top of the hierachy of institutions in which the seminary is the resource institution for churches which, in turn, serve as support resources for individuals and for the whole range of "operating" institutions: governments, businesses, schools, hospitals, social agencies, families, communities? In asking this question the trustees will be suggesting that the seminary should have a concern for the missions of churches and help churches to clarify their own separate missions, thus preparing themselves for a much greater society-shaping role

than most churches now enjoy — society shaping by leading, not by manipulation or coercion.

This will be a most difficult concept for some seminaries to accept: that they will be models of institutional achievement and influence society, through the churches, more by the example of the quality of life within the seminary than by preachment. If the seminary can reach even a modest achievement as a model of "power in the mission" and can clearly demonstrate the effectiveness and strength in an institution that moves on this principle, it could, in time, influence the quality of the whole society.

2. Is Critical Thought a High Priority in the Seminary?

Critical thought is not necessarily identical with scholarship and the writing of books and papers that establish a scholar's reputation with peers. Scholarship is a necessary condition for critical reflection, but it does not automatically produce it. Critical thought is a fulfillment of the root meaning of seminary: seminalis, seed. It is the reflective thought that produces seminal ideas — ideas that become new visions in both ministers as persons and churches as institutions; ideas that support ministers and churches as they nurture *servants* who may shape the institutions that dominate the lives of all of us.

The adequacy of critical thought in seminaries is tested ultimately by ordinary folk who have its significance in their lives made real through their participation in churches. The incremental actions that build the serving quality of society, or maintain such as it has, are taken by legions of people who get inspiration and guidance from somewhere, mostly from churches — directly or indirectly.

We lack a theology of institutions for these times. I do not fault seminary theologians for this; their trustees are failing to do what only trustees can do: ask the penetrating and persistent questions that insure the adequacy of critical thought in the seminary.

3. Does the Image Created by the Statement of Mission for the Seminary Suggest a Strong Contemporary Institution?

The nature of any seminary closely identifies it with its own

history and tradition. It is precisely that tradition that frees the seminary to be always effective in contemporary society.

It is important that the mission suggest that the seminary, through the churches, is serving this contemporary society and is moving with that society into the uncertain future. Particularly, it should be clear that the seminary is supporting the churches — with the stuff to be strong — as they serve both individuals in their private and family lives and as they prepare, support, and inspire those who mold and shape modern institutions. Seminaries should be seen by informed people as critically important, strong, and useful contemporary institutions. The implication of the word *strong* is that seminaries are an influential society-shaping force because of the leadership they give to churches. But it is important that both the language and concepts of the statement of mission create the image of contemporaniety — it is the quality of *this* society that is the seminary's prime concern.

One of the important learnings from the university debacle of the 1960's may be that more attention to their history might have saved some universities from harm in that difficult period. Clearly, a mission concept that was adequate for 1900 did not suffice in the 1960's. A sense of history keeps one constantly aware that a mission statement that was adequate yesterday may not serve well today.

4. Does the Seminary Attract Students Who Have the Potential to Become Influential Leaders of Churches and Church Institutions, and Does it Attract Faculty Who Are Capable of Training Such Students?

Those who are attracted as students and faculty are influenced by the image discussed above. They are also attracted by what they know, from informed people, is really there.

Is the seminary really strong? Does it prepare people for effective leadership of influential churches and church institutions? Strong people as leaders make strong institutions — because those people have the intellect, stability, integrity, *and spirit* required to generate *trust* in those who might respond to their leadership. *Lead* is used in the common meaning of "go out ahead to show the way." The connotations of *lead* are quite distinct from those of *manage* (control) or *administer* (care for). Leading is venturing and risktaking. "The way is not clear. I will go out ahead to show the way. Follow me!"

Leadership is not a professional calling. In any church, anybody can lead who can generate trust in followers. One task of the seminary is to provide as many professionally prepared women and men as it can, persons who have the ability to generate that trust in churches and church institutions so as to give them great influence.

There may be a place for a seminary that prepares pastors to serve weak or nominal churches. But if, as assumed here, a preferred role of the seminary is to prepare pastors as leaders who will build *strong* churches and church institutions, then the seminary must strive to admit those students who are most likely to qualify for that service. It is important that the mission attract those who want that kind of demanding role and discourage those who do not want it. One feature of any admissions process is self selection by potential students and faculty — they tend to select themselves "in" or "out."

5. Does the Seminary Experience Develop Spirit?

The seminary, like other educational institutions, shapes and forms in ways that we but dimly understand. It is a community that has an ethos that is, in part, a consequence of its mission and how that mission is understood. There is a deeper issue of informing the life of the seminary community which suggests that the literary quality of the mission statement is important. Does it sing, does it carry spirit and inspire qualities of leadership and teaching that are spirit building? Part of the power in a statement of mission is the poetry of its expression that sets the seminary clearly apart from bureaucratic institutions.

Spirit is commonly defined as the animating force within living beings. In a seminary I would want to add a value dimension to this definition: Is the person who is possessed of spirit disposed to be servant? Do those being served, ***while being served***, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? No one will be hurt.

Whether the seminary develops spirit, thus defined, seems to me to depend more on the quality of the seminary as an institution than on the precise design of its program. Has the seminary itself

evolved as servant; deep down inside is this what the seminary really is? One does not teach about spirit. One really is spirit.

Mission is a statement of how a seminary sees itself — at its very core. Is it, in its essence, *spiritual?* Does the statement of mission reflect this?

6. Does the Governing Idea (Mission) Have Power?

There is only one test: if the mission does not have power, it will not guide those who govern and people will be without purpose. The advantages of a powerful mission, enumerated earlier, will be only partly realized — if at all.

Earlier I suggested that ours is a business dominated culture because the missions of businesses are usually better defined than in most other institutions. They get that way partly because business executives usually have more coercive power than do executives of others, partly because the pursuit of private gain and survival in the competitive struggle require it.

My hope for the future, stated earlier, is that our culture will, in time, become less dominated by institutions that are ruled by coercive power, and motivated by private gain and competitive striving, and move toward a quality of society in which voluntary consensus and search for the good are a greater force than they are today. Could seminaries emerge as leaders of this movement by becoming institutions that are distinguished because of the power of persuasion and caring that comes in response to inspired trustee leadership whose primary tactic is penetrating questions?

These six questions are only suggestions for trustees of a seminary. Each trustee board will devise its own questions. If trustees ask such questions, and thereby give leadership toward defining a clear and powerful mission, what then is the role of the executive? It seems to me that the mission defines that role: it is to take those subtle steps of encouragement and discouragement that keep the seminary clearly centered on growth in achievement of its mission — with as close to consensus as possible.

Leadership — Going out Ahead to Show the Way.

Both the person and the institution are damaged if a seminary chews up its executive because she or he failed when they tried to give

leadership in formulating a new and powerful mission. If the trustee chairperson tries to give this leadership to trustees — and fails, that chairperson can quietly withdraw with little damage to the person or the institution. In short, *chairpersons are expendable, executives are not.* Part of the reason for this difference is that the executive is a colleague of the faculty, the chairperson is not (or should not be.) The executive has a career stake in the position, the chairperson does not (or should not have).

The head of the board who is not a seminary theologian (and should not be) can, by leading trustees to ask questions like those above, become a *public theologian.* The executive, who is a seminary theologian, cannot, on her or his own, ask questions like these. The executive's role is to lead the process of finding answers and to serve as interlocutor between trustees and various constituencies whose acceptance of the mission is necessary. This is a sensitive role.

With help from the chair, trustees may come to accept that the gap between potential and performance in their seminary is wide, but they can hold firm in their belief in the possibility for a great powerful new mission for the seminary that will, in time, cause a dramatic reduction in that gap and move the seminary into the influential position that it should occupy. As matters now stand, seminary theologians, whether faculty members or executives, would have difficulty holding this view and carrying on with their present work. The seminary must be maintained as it is while its greater future is being worked out.

The best trustees, especially the one in the chair, will believe that a new clear and powerful mission can indeed result from dialogue that questions like the above will induce. Further, trustees will believe that mission will evolve in such a way that faculty and executives grow in the process. It is the kind of faith that people who move institutions of any kind have to have. There are such people available for seminary trustees, and every seminary trustee board should have at least one. That one, with the power of his or her faith, will lead the rest. And, if they fail, they will quietly retire so that someone else can try.

A seminary that is a viable contemporary institution will have at all times a person in the chair who holds this unqualified faith that movement toward potential greatness in the seminary is a realistically achievable goal. Such is faith in the power of a great idea. And it is contagious!

Reflections on the Relevance of Faith to Mission.

What I have been writing the past ten years has brought me into close contact with churches: from local parishes to denominational bodies; and church institutions — hospitals, schools, and seminaries. Most of these involvements have centered on the servant-leader theme about which I have been writing. A major insight (to me) emerged out of this church experience two years ago when I met with an ecumenical group of high level church executives who were convened for three days in a retreat house to consider the subject "The Churchman as Leader." There were just sixteen churchmen and I.

The first two days were taken by a candid discussion among the churchmen of their leadership problems, as they saw them — which were numerous. Change a few words and their problems seemed to me to be no different from those of the harried executives I have been listening to all my life. On the third day I entered the discussion and made some comments based on what I had heard. As I prepared for that third day a disturbing thought came to mind. Their main leadership problem seemed to be that they did not believe their own stuff — not as it applies to the institutional affairs of their churches. They are able, conscientious men, but they lack the kind of faith that anyone who would lead anything in a significant way must have.

I did not share this observation with the church executives the next day, although I touched the edge of it -- partly because I was not sure it would be helpful, partly because this was an insight that needed to be digested. If I were meeting with them today, I might share it because, as I have reflected further on my many experiences with churches, it seems to me that the inability (or unwillingness) to be guided by their religious beliefs in dealing with the human affairs of their churches may be the problem of the whole church establishment and it may account for the failure of churches to give the leadership to this troubled society that they are in the best position to give. The one exception to this generalization that I would note is the Catholic Women's Religious; but they seem troubled by their isolation and bewildered by the prospect that it may be up to them to lead. I wish they could generate more power to lead because they seem to have faith that people and institutions in this chaotic world can change for the better — and that inspired leadership by us ordinary mortals can bring it about. I would

say that such faith is *faith as trust.* I once overheard one of the Sisters say, "there is no worse cynic than a religious cynic!"

What is the relevance of these reflections to the subject of this essay, *Mission in a Seminary — A Prime Concern of Trustees?* It is simply this: to most people in seminaries, or who know intimately about them, the notion that *any* contemporary seminary could move from where it now is to the kind of institution described in this essay (and its predecessor *The Seminary as an Institution*) is one of those unbelievable things — a pipe dream. Only a person of truly great faith could accept it as a possibility to be seriously considered. That is why I said earlier that a seminary is not likely to move toward this vision unless it has trustees, particularly in a person in the chair, who are firm in that faith and who have the competence, tenacity, and fortitude that sustained and effective leadership to this end will require.

One would not have to be a cynic to say "I do not see any people on the horizon who might be such trustees for my seminary, especially one to chair it, people who have the faith, plus the necessary competence, tenacity, and fortitude to give the leadership that the achievement of this vision requires." I agree; I do not see them either. But I believe that they are not visible because they are not expected to be there—in fact, *they are not wanted by some.* A letter from a seminary executive, commenting on my essay on *The Seminary as an Institution,* says, regarding the role outlined there for the chairperson, "The idea seems to suggest that a chairperson serves for a long time. In fact, at least among all . . . . seminaries, and perhaps some others, the chairperson serves no more than two years and is, for all practical purposes, the presiding officer only. As I understand what you are saying, I reject it outright." This is a candid expression of what might be a quite general attitude. But such trustees seem to me to be little more than a legal front for faculty and administrators and for the denomination that has de facto control. For a trustee to accept such a limited role is clearly a breach of trust. Directors of a publicly held business corporation who accept this kind of role might be held personally liable in case of some default.

In our times, the heart of the matter of faith in the improvability of human performance — in institutions — may be *trust.* We have the misfortune to live in an era of low trust. I suspect we are in that state because, in relatively short time, we have moved from a society of in-

dividuals relating to individuals to a society in which most of us are involved in complex relationships with institutions. And a widely held basis for trusting people in institutions has not yet evolved. The visible basis for trust, fully functioning trustees, is conspicuously absent in too many institutions — including some seminaries. The first step to recover trust is to install trustees who are trustworthy.

Part of the opportunity to rebuild trust in our times is for trustees to become valid symbols of trust in their institution, and for the one who occupies the chair to stand tall among colleagues in building that symbol. But if there are no visible persons available for trustees, especially chairpersons as so conceived, this opportunity ranks with the unbelievable to many who are involved with seminaries.

I believe the opportunity is real and achievable because of my long experience with people who have demonstrated their ability to carry heavy burdens. Latent in many of these able men and women is trustee potential of the quality that seminaries need. I have had enough experience as an agent in the human transformation process to believe that this latent trusteeship ability can be brought to maturity as seminary trustees, even in some who are old.

Faith is required to do the unbelievable and to demonstrate that something can be done — for the first time. After it has been proven feasible; it may require great courage, strength, and competence to do it again — but it may not require faith. Where is the transforming agent with faith who will wield the formative influence that will produce trustees of this stature for seminaries? *Seminaries will do it for themselves.* Why should someone else produce these trustees for seminaries? Seminaries will produce their own trustees, and they will also render this service for churches and church related institutions — a massive opportunity. A seminary that rises to this opportunity will grow conspicuously in stature.

"And how will we do that?" the incredulous seminary executive or trustee may ask. There is no easy answer to that question because that is what creative leadership is about. A seminary, as it now stands, will find in its present resources the initiative to take the first step. A first order of business for any seminary that would operate with a great sense of mission may be to conceptualize the trustee role so as to make that role attractive to the people who would be the trustees that would give the leadership that would produce a great mission. Such trustees will then

give the seminary the sustaining strength to operate with distinction within that mission.

The first question such a potential trustee might ask is "to whom will I be responsible?" The trustee is, of course, responsible to the closely related constituencies of the seminary: its students, faculty, staff, and administrators and to the churches and other institutions that give it money, that employ its graduates, and that look to the seminary for both leadership and prophetic vision. Each of these constituencies has power — in one way or another and in varying degrees and sometimes in conflict with other constituencies — power to enforce its will on the seminary and on the character of its mission. The wise potential trustee, one who has the capacity to lead the seminary to a great mission, will know that as a trustee, these close constituencies will not be his or her primary responsibility. That primary responsibility will be to the society as a whole and to its needs. And he or she will want to know, "can these close constituencies be brought to accept that this seminary exists primarily to serve the critical needs of society?" (I suggested two of these current critical problems at the outset: widespread alienation in all strata of the population and the inability or unwillingness to serve of far too many of the institutions that make up our complex society.) In order to bring this exceptional trustee to its service, any seminary as it now stands will need to give evidence that it is amenable to being led to acceptance of a great mission that is built around some definition of the public good, a mission that is accomplished through the churches that the seminary inspires, leads, and supports.

A great new seminary mission need not disturb present programs. A significant added dimension, concern for religious leadership, may be all that is required. If that new work is sustained by trustee support, in time existing programs may accommodate to it. Serious concern in the seminary for religious leadership may stir a profound new area for theological reflection. What is hoped for is that religious leadership that originates in seminaries will find its way, through the churches, to nurture values and inspire venturesome spirit in those who will (a) build truly serving institutions and (b) generate in young people hope that they can become servants.

. . .

If one would lead *as servant*, one will first be open to being led by servants. Openness to leading by servants is a manifestation of *faith as trust*.

• • •

In *The Seminary as an Institution*, written a year ago, I wrote, "I am confident that any seminary that makes the reach to move from the marginal stance toward a central and crucial role, will find a much more rewarding institutional existence than what many now enjoy. And I believe that the typical seminary can make this movement, over time, by a series of prudent steps; prudent, but not necessarily comfortable. The first step for a seminary may be to accept that, next to survival, building leadership strength — to lead the churches — may be its first priority in these times."

I still have this confidence.

Critical Thought in the Seminary and the Trustee Chairperson's Role

WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGE does chairing the trustees of a seminary present?

A chairperson's answer would depend on how one sees the opportunities and obligations in that position, what one believes about the place of seminaries in society and their unrealized potential for service, and what one's personal feelings are concerning the assumption of leadership. One decides where one stands on issues like these. Then one chooses a role from a range of possibilities beginning, at the low end of the scale, with the seminary executive's view quoted earlier in which ". . . the chairperson serves no more than two years and is, for all practical purposes, the presiding officer only." Near the other end of the spectrum is one who believes that the seminary can be led by prudent steps toward the achievement of a much greater vision of service to society than most now aspire to, and who is disposed to take the risks of leadership to move it there.

What can be said to one who accepts the latter version of a chairing role and chooses to give leadership that will help move a seminary toward realizing a new vision of service to society by greatly strengthened churches? How can such a leader be helped?

There are ample resources for help on how best to carry the important fiduciary aspects of all trusteeships. This essay will discuss

the opportunity for unusual leadership from the chair when the effort is made to move the seminary, a unique kind of institution, from the marginal role that many now seem to occupy to the pivotal position that is envisioned in the first two chapters.

The one who undertakes to give this leadership will need to be prepared to contend with a negative mind-set that disposes too many concerned and thoughtful people to write off seminaries as having little force in contemporary society. As matters now stand in some seminaries, this may be a valid judgment. But one who chooses to give new creative leadership to seminary trustees needs to believe firmly that we cannot afford to dismiss them since there is urgent need for an effective instrument in the spot that seminaries now occupy and there are neither the time nor the resources to replace existing seminaries with more serving institutions that will give needed support to churches. Unless one wants to abandon the idea of building a better society through greatly strengthened churches, there is no feasible alternative to rebuilding seminaries that will give powerful new support to churches. The word *rebuilding* is used advisedly. No mere revision of the curriculum will do it. The acceptance of such a premise may be part of the armor of one who would lead the trustees of a seminary as, collectively, they lead the seminary toward a future of greatness as servant.

The discussion of critical thought in the seminary in Chapter two includes the following:

> *Critical thought* is not necessarily identical with scholarship and the writing of books and papers that establish a scholar's reputation with peers. Scholarship is a necessary condition for critical reflection, but it does not automatically produce it. Critical thought is a fulfillment of the root meaning of seminary: seminalis — seed. It is the reflective thought that produces seminal ideas — ideas that become new visions in both ministers as persons and churches as institutions, ideas that support both ministers and churches as they nurture servants who may shape the institutions that dominate the lives of all of us.

The adequacy of critical thought in seminaries is tested ultimately by ordinary folk who have its significance in their

lives made real by participation in churches. The incremental actions that build the serving quality of society, or maintain such as it has, are taken by legions of people who get inspiration and guidance from somewhere, mostly from churches — directly or indirectly.

I believe that the critical thought now emerging from seminaries generally is far from adequate for the urgent needs of these times. Too many churches are languishing for want of intellectual stimulus from seminaries. And seminaries are therefore not giving the vital leadership to churches that supports them as they undertake to wield their constructive influence on society — leadership of ideas that give hope expressed in language that lifts the spirit. The premise here is that the need for more influential critical thought from seminaries is great.

Before discussing the implications of this belief, let us make a brief scan of history of seminaries in the mainline protestant denominations in the US.

Seminary Leadership, an Historical View

There have been two approaches to critical thinking in and regarding seminaries: (1) about the seminary as an institution and (2) about the substance of theology itself. Such consideration of seminaries as institutions is more effective when it shapes the thinking of those who give the ultimate leadership to seminaries, their trustees. Theological ideas are more likely to be useful in building a better society if seminary theologians clothe them in persuasive reasoning and express them in language that gives them the power of prophetic vision. This vision will inspire and guide churches as they work to heal and prevent alienation and give strength and direction to those who will help build serving instituiuons of all sorts. I am not a close student of the history of seminaries but I have done enough reading to have some views about how to stimulate critical thinking about both the seminary as an institution and its theology.

The first protestant seminaries in the United States were Andover (1808-Congregational) and Princeton (1812-Presbyterian). In 1815 a remarkable new institution emerged that was called American Education Society (AES). This was a group of strong

and able people who effectively became trustees for protestant theological seminaries in the early 19th century. The AES's primary concern was not only for seminaries and churches but for the durability of the young republic which was not assured at that time, and they believed that strong churches that were served by pastors who were both pious and learned were needed to give the society of their day the sinews of strength. Their strategy was to encourage the growth of seminaries on the Andover model of four years of undergraduate education followed by three years of seminary. They set out to accomplish this objective by raising funds for scholarships to subsidize the seminary education of students of any evangelical denomination that provided this solid scholarly three-year postgraduate program.

Until early in the nineteenth century many pastors in protestant churches in the United States were trained as most other professionals were: by apprenticeship to an established practitioner. "Reading theology" was the common term. It could refer to an apprenticeship or to the final year in college. Meanwhile, others acquired the "gift" of ministry in less formal ways — by just starting to preach. The "circuit riding" pastors of frontier days needed only a few sermons, and this way sufficed for them. Both ways had the effect of producing pastors who were sometimes "pious but not learned."

With this AES support, the expansion of seminary resources on the Andover model was rapid. The AES continued for some decades as a powerful force, not only in increasing the number of seminaries but in sustaining the model of a three-year postgraduate curriculum whose chief components (relying on a prior study of classical languages) according to some observers were "Biblical studies, based on the original languages, sacred history, and didactic theology." There was vigorous opposition to this approach, but the founders of AES were strong enough to hold to their course. However, scholarly seminary preparation of clergy did not become the prevailing mode in the United States until well into the twentieth century.

This spectacular development of theological education that AES sponsored was launched well before the radical social changes of the industrial revolution. The steam engine was there in 1800

but the first practical steam boat and railway locomotive did not emerge in the United States until near the middle of the century. The pastor who was trained in the older theological traditions could understand the total life of his parishioners because the conditions of life were not too different from Biblical times in which the theology of that day was firmly rooted. There was in that period little reason to question the adequacy of Biblical theology as the quite complete preparation of a pastor.

But the character of American society was soon to change radically. By 1900 a powerful new voice had risen in William Rainey Harper, an eminent theologian and founding president of the University of Chicago. In 1899 he wrote a spirited article in The American Journal of Theology entitled, "Shall the Theological Curriculum be Modified, and How?" It is a searching and provocative examination of curriculum design, and it contained a recognition of new conditions of society that needed to be addressed in the preparation of pastors. Some passages from Harper's article follow.

> "Some adjustment must be found by which the curriculum will meet the demands that are made by the present peculiar social conditions. Reference has already been made to the inability of the ordinary preacher to make an impression on the lower classes. The evidence is quite conclusive that he is equally unable to influence the higher classes. The country is full of men who have become wealthy . . . What is the attitude of the church toward this growing class of influential men . . . Nothing has yet been proposed to provide a training which will enable the ministry to do successful work among the higher classes."

> "If the student is to do his work in a democratic atmosphere, he must be filled with the democratic spirit and must learn to employ democratic methods. This is not the spirit, and these are not the methods, of the ordinary theological seminary."

> "The condition of the churches, both rural and urban is not upon the whole encouraging. Ministers of the better classes are not satisfied to accept rural churches; and yet these same

ministers are not strong enough, or sufficiently prepared, to meet the demands of many of the city churches."

"They (theological students) have little or no sympathy with scientific work. They utterly lack that point of view which will enable them to bring themselves into relationship with that greatest factor in modern civilization."

"The great majority of American seminaries are located in out-of-the-way places and are not in touch with modern life."

"The present scope of the theological curriculum includes practical preparation for only one kind of Christian work; namely, preaching."

"The usual practice in theological seminaries of providing free tuition and rooms . . . cultivates in the very beginning of life a principle which in too many cases is applied throughout life."

"The study of the Hebrew language should be made elective."

"Much of the technique of a theological education could be put aside to advantage, if this time thus gained could be occupied by work in English Literature."

These quotes are just a sampling of Harper's essay. There was much more.

What Harper did not note in his essay in 1899 (and which seems even more apparent to me as a student of organization in 1983) is that Biblical theology was inadequate for the problem he described. And it is even more inadequate in our times when the majority of us are enmeshed in vast bureaucracies — business, government, education, church — all of which have the same problems, and when the family farm that was dominant in Harper's day is largely gone. The fallacy (as I see it) that continues from Harper's day to this is that theologians assume that the needs of a radically changed (and changing) society can be met in seminaries just by revising the curriculum and that this is all that is needed to make seminaries (and the churches that depend on them for intellectual and prophetic leadership) fully serving contemporary institutions. My cursory reading of history tells me that this may have been a valid assumption in the early days of AES.

But by 1850 the conditions of the emerging society called for new critical thinking leading to a new theology — not repudiating the old, but adding what the new conditions required — and it was not forthcoming. Elsewhere I have noted that when Karl Marx sat in the British Museum composing the theories that would shape so much of the contemporary world, was he not filling a void resulting from the failure of theologians of his day to deal effectively with the new conditions of the industrial revolution? And does this void not exist today, even greater now than in Marx's time?

How can I justify these assertions? I have had more than fifty years of listening to and watching of those who carry the leading and managing roles in institutions of all sorts, large and small. In all of this I rarely hear reference to influence being wielded on these people's institutional roles by churches. And discussions of administrative problems by church leaders that I have listened to (and I have done quite a lot of such listening) sound no different from those of business people. Yet the effect on the quality and character of contemporary society by the combined decisions these people make, people who are leading and administering American institutions, is the overpowering influence of our times.

A dedicated religious business person wrote earlier this year:

> "A speaker recently said in an address on the future of the church and evangelicalism, 'Christian programs are not working at all in the business and professional world; the church is answering questions nobody is asking. 91.8% of 750 men in a survey said they would prefer talking with a fellow layman about spiritual matters.' "
>
> "I wholly concur. Paid clergy are viewed by the business community as largely irrelevant. There is little to no business metaphor in church teachings or sermons unless as an object of criticism or derision . . . The net result of this neutral or negative posture by the church is to overlook the condition of 100 million working men and women . . ."

I have no sense of how widely this harsh judgment may be held among thoughtful lay people; but I suspect there is a disturbing amount of it.

A recent news release of the Catholic Bishop's Committee on Priestly Formation announces that "The committee has invited the Rector-Presidents of all Catholic Theological Schools in the United States and their sponsoring Ordinaries to a three-day meeting July 17-20, 1983 . . ."

"The major concerns to be addressed are: (1) How can we maintain the high quality of our formation programs; (2) How can we attract the quality of candidates to meet the needs of the Church of tomorrow; (3) How can we exercise an adequate stewardship of limited resources, both personnel and financial."

The challenge today (as I see it) is the same in its essentials as that faced, and accepted, by the American Education Society in 1815: to produce able pastors who will lead influential churches that will add strength and quality to contemporary society. The difference is that in 1815 the available concept of the seminary, the Andover model, and the content of Biblical theology, were both judged adequate. Today neither seems adequate. New critical thought is urgently needed about both the concept of the institution and the content of its theology.

Those who founded the American Education Association in 1815 and gave such powerful impetus to early nineteenth century theological education were motivated by an intense concern for the survival of the young democracy. The motivation that might move seminary trustees in the late twentieth century may be similar — to heal and strengthen an ailing society. The means available for both seem to be the same: stronger, better led churches. But the strategy for implementing those means may be radically different today from what it was when the protestant seminary movement started.

I have said that the strong group that made up the American Education Society were, in effect, the trustees of an important segment of protestant theological seminaries of that period. As I see it, the trustees of seminaries today, particularly their chairpersons, are best positioned to give the leadership that will produce the much needed critical thought about the seminary as an institution and the theology that both guides it and which it advocates as prophetic vision for churches.

If the chairperson accepts the risks of leadership that will be re-

quired to bring the seminary to become what it has the opportunity to become and to produce needed ideas, a strategy for such effective leadership will be needed. Where is the relevant experience that the seminary trustee chairperson might turn to in devising this strategy?

Where is the Relevant Experience?

If the trustee chairperson of a seminary resolves to give leadership that will help the seminary become a greater force in strengthening churches in our times, how does one proceed? What experience is there to draw upon to help one devise a strategy of leadership that will bring the seminary to become a great new source of critical thought — both about itself as an institution and about the theology that it provides for churches?

Such a move in many seminaries would call for a substantial regeneration of the seminary as an institution. It would be a major undertaking that would not likely take place without astute and sustained leadership from the trustees, especially the one who chairs the board.

In the world of institutions, all can be roughly grouped in two classes: those designed so that they fail easily and live under the constant threat of failure, and those that are designed so that failure is difficult and rare. Businesses are generally in the first category and nonprofit agencies and governmental units are in the second. Because of this sharp disparity, most of the experience with the process of regenerating moribund or low-serving institutions is in business. And the seminary trustee chairperson who is searching for ideas on how to give leadership to the school so as to bring it to greatness as servant with an abundance of critical thought as one of its distinguishing characteristics will be well advised to look to business experience as one source of ideas. I do not suggest that either seminary faculty or administrators should be concerned with the experience of business regeneration, but that their trustee chairperson take a close look at that experience.

My AT&T Experience as an Example

I had the good fortune to spend my active career in American Telephone and Telegraph Company which had experienced a ma-

jor regeneration shortly before I arrived in 1926 and some of the people who brought it through this great change were still around. From these people I learned much about how that transformation was accomplished that may never get into written history.

The telephone was invented in Boston in 1876. The company was started in 1878 by Bostonians who lacked both vision and an adventurous spirit, and it remained in their hands until 1907 when J.P. Morgan the elder wrested control from them, installed a great builder, Theodore N. Vail, (who earlier had been the company's first general manager), as President, moved the headquarters to New York, and gave it a vision and started it on an adventurous course. Morgan, who earlier had been instrumental in launching both General Electric and U.S. Steel gave a powerful push to move AT&T from an ordinary to an exceptional institution.

In 1907 the company was a going concern but it was burdened by four serious problems: (1) There was an acute employee morale problem, (2) The public reputation of the company was very bad. (3) There was a question about its financial soundness. (4) The available technology was insufficient to permit the development of the scope and quality of telephone service that we know today and that Vail and Morgan were determined to bring about. By 1920, when Vail died in the harness, all four of these were corrected, some seminal ideas about the institution and its technology emerged, and the company was a "blue chip."

I entered the company in 1926 and I immediately became interested in its history. The top question on my mind for a number of years was, how did this remarkable transformation come about? The answer was slow in coming, partly because it was so difficult to judge what Morgan's role was. As I see it now, Morgan, as he was then, would not only be out of style today but he would be legally restrained. In the context of his times, however, he was a great trustee. He had and used great power, sometimes ruthlessly; but *he cared intensely about the quality of the businesses he controlled,* an extraordinary attribute for a person of great wealth early in this century. We cannot know now how much of Vail's

genius as an institution builder should be attributed to Morgan. A safe assumption is to view them as a joint personality.

How did the transformation of AT&T come about? Very simple in concept; but awfully difficult to do. There were three basic strategies that I believe are universally applicable to the regeneration of any kind of institution at any time.

Strategies for Change

1) *Mission.* In his early period as the first general manager, Vail stated the mission thus: "We will build a telephone system so that any person, any place in the world, can talk to anybody else, any place else in the world, quickly, cheaply, satisfactorily." We aren't there yet, nearly 100 years after that goal was stated. But I believe we are much closer to it now than we would be if the man who piloted the company in those crucial years (1907-20) had not "thought big". In that later period the goal was stated more modestly as "universal service" — perhaps because the company had lost a few tail feathers in its first brush with the antitrust enforcers in 1913. When I entered the business in 1926 there was still some of the feeling that we were "building a cathedral, not just laying bricks." It would be difficult in any institution to sustain the sense of urgency noted later if the commonly accepted mission does not require it.

The first step toward defining mission for one who chairs seminary trustees is to get an answer to the question, "Whom and what purpose does this seminary serve?" The chair should ask this question and stay with it until all constituencies — trustees, administrators, faculty, students, alumni — are agreed on a concept that the chair is willing to lead. If the constituencies, after long and patient urging either cannot agree, or if what they can agree on seems unacceptable to the one in the chair, perhaps that person should quietly retire and find something better to do. When Vail, the first general manager of AT&T, was unable to move the conservative Bostonians to become builders, he left the company and resisted later importunings to return when the company was in trouble. He did not return for twenty years until the Bostonians were ousted by Morgan who was himself a great builder.

If the agreed-upon mission statement for a seminary is one I

could accept if I were to undertake to lead the board, these are the answers I would prefer to see to the questions whom and what purpose does this seminary serve? *Whom?* Religious leaders, whether in churches or other institutions. *What purpose?* To provide churches with ideas and leadership to the end that churches become and are sustained as significant forces that heal and prevent alienation in people and nurture the leaders who will build serving institutions everywhere. The seminary might do some other things, but if I were to be the chairperson, this definition of mission — or one close to it — would be primary. Other chairpersons might view it differently. My advice to any such persons is: don't undertake to lead the board and the seminary in a direction you do not firmly believe in. Otherwise you will not be able to lead with spirit. Spirit will be needed.

2) *Obstacles to greatness are clearly identified* and the full ramifications of each is described. Then a capable staff person is assigned to each problem with the clear charge to find the means for turning it around and to persuade — to move — all of the people who need to act. As long as an obstacle to greatness remains as a problem, a capable staff person makes a high priority of finding a way to deal with it. If at any time it appears that the person assigned is either unable or unwilling to press for an answer, that person is replaced.

3) *A sense of urgency is created* and the move toward greatness is widely accepted as an imperative.

It was my privilege to work at AT&T under the executive who, as a young man in 1907, was given the assignment of raising the morale and integrity of the women in the business — a difficult and essential task. By 1926 when I entered the person who brought about this transformation had made an elite corps out of the department (switchboard operation) where most women worked. One of the by-products was that this department (in 1926) was producing a greatly disproportionate share of the top officers in the company (then all men). The man who piloted this transformation (one of the most perfect gentlemen I ever met) accomplished it from a staff position entirely by persuasion. He was supported by the feeling of urgency that pervaded the business in that crucial period from 1907 to 1920.

From the soundings available about seminaries I deduce that the principal urgency in some of them these days is the need for money to survive. In a seminary in which this is a valid judgment, could it be that one of the reasons for the primacy of money in seminaries is that there is not sufficient urgency felt regarding critical thought, the production of seminal ideas that are sorely needed in a faltering society?

When someone says to me, "you can't cause seminal ideas to emerge where they don't exist," my response is, "Oh, yes you can! (1) If you have a widely accepted mission for the institution that embodies a great dream of what it might become. (2) If you carefully identify all of the obstacles that stand in the way of realizing that dream and see to it that a competent person sets to work to remove or find a way around each obstacle. And (3) if you sustain a sense of urgency about the whole process of regenerating the institution."

Do these three things, and do them well, and the chance that seminal ideas will emerge in the process is very good — no matter how limited the institution may have been at the start. This is what the experiences of businesses in general, and the one I know best — AT&T — in particular, have to suggest to the chairperson of seminary trustees who would give leadership to a development that would favor the growth of critical thought — as marked by the emergence of seminal ideas — in the seminary. It may require more acumen from the one in the chair to sustain this urgency in a seminary than in the usual business. But there are only 200 seminaries in the U.S. and the nature of the opportunity to serve is such that every seminary should have an exceptional leader to chair its trustees, or the equivalent of that person in seminaries that do not have their own trustees. That urgency will need to be felt at all times if the typical seminary is to move in influence from where it now is to the society-shaping role that it is correctly positioned to carry. Only the chairperson, using tactics that are appropriate for a seminary in these times, is likely to be successful in creating that urgency. If the executive tries to create it, his or her tenure may be short. As I have noted in Chapter I, trustees (including the chairperson) are expendable; administrators are not.

The chairperson need not be able to design the creative steps

that will be taken within the seminary to produce the seminal ideas that will inspire and support pastors, nor need he or she be conversant with the curriculum designs that will prepare pastors as significant religious leaders. Both of these are appropriately the professional concern of administrators and faculty. Trustees will want to review and comment on these matters, but they will not be the prime movers in these areas.

Trustees, especially the one in the chair, will need to be clear about the ultimate result of the seminary's work: more religious leaders everywhere and strong, influential, ably led churches; and be able to judge whether, in the carrying out of that mission, the ultimate influence on and support of churches is adequate. Trustees should be aware of and interested in, but stand somewhat aloof from, the effort of administrators and faculty to move the program of the seminary from mission to accomplishment. It is more appropriate for a lay person, than for a credentialed professional, to maintain this detached position. The seminary clearly needs professional strength, although what constitutes optimum professional strength in a seminary may bear fresh examination, an examination that needs what only wise lay judgment is likely to bring.

Advantage in the Lay Status of the Chairperson

The issue of strength in lay judgments is a debatable one, but the case for the importance of trustees, particularly the chairperson, in any institution rests upon acceptance of the possibility of that strength being realized. The best example I have of this is drawn from my AT&T experience — an example of the strength in lay judgments in a situation in which *that* was where wisdom resided.

The original National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) was enacted in 1935. Shortly thereafter fifty great corporation lawyers met and agreed that this law would be held unconstitutional and that they would all advise their client companies to disregard it. When this conclusion was brought back and advocated by our AT&T lawyer who was present at that meeting, he was promptly and forcefully challenged by my boss, an able and persuasive older man with but a fifth grade education. He was not in the upper

levels of management but he was in a position in which he could be heard. Although his grammar was not impeccable, he was a powerful debater, a strong, honest, intelligent man, but with no legal training or experience. The gist of his argument was that this was 1935, not 1905. This was the second time in as many years that the principle in the Wagner Act had been legislated (the first was a section of the earlier National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 that was declared unconstitutional.) It clearly represented a firm social policy that would prevail. If this present law was not upheld, new laws would keep coming until one was sustained. Therefore, we should start immediately to bring ourselves into conformity with it (a state, with largely "company" unions, that we missed by quite a margin.) There was a great verbal battle, but this boss of mine (twenty years my senior) was a tough, formidable man. After much grumbling, he prevailed and the company started (with too deliberate speed) toward compliance. If his position had not prevailed, and if AT&T had held to the intransigent position that all of those lawyers advocated (that the automobile companies and others did accept and brought on the terrible imbroglio of 1939) AT&T might have been dismembered then. And if this man's kind of thinking could have been more influential in top management councils in the years that followed, the breakup might not be taking place now.

Part of the strength of this untutored layman's position was that he was not a lawyer. He was a very conservative man (in the best sense) and he was able to look at the crisis that confronted the company as a social policy question, not a legal issue. And he believed, with the comic character of the time — Mr. Dooley — that even the Supreme Court, given a little time, reads the election returns. The Wagner Act was affirmed by the top court in 1937.

The strength of my old boss in this encounter was not just that he was not a lawyer, although that freed him from the "mind-set" that seems inherent in all credentialed professionals, or that he lacked formal education. Most important, I believe, was that he possessed the priceless gift of seeing things whole and, because of this, his advice was frequently sought by "better educated" people who lacked that gift. Is this not the quality,

above all others, that should be sought in the trustee chairperson of a seminary? It is not a common ability, yet it does exist. The two hundred seminaries in the U.S. could find such a person to chair their trustees if they were clear that that is what they need and want. And such are more likely to be found among uncredentialed laypersons.

Such a person in the chair, if otherwise qualified by motives, temperament, and skills, would likely be accepted by fellow trustees and other constituencies of the seminary and could supply the essential ingredient of wisdom regarding the adequacy of the critical thinking that is the heart of the seminary's work. This would be accomplished by watchfulness over the three steps suggested earlier as essential for *any* institution that achieves greatness as servant.

The Idea of the Seminary

If the seminary answers the question "Whom and what purpose should this seminary serve" in terms like those suggested earlier in these chapters, the one who chairs the trustees (assuming that that person has the gift of seeing things whole) may ask, "Is this seminary, as it now stands — both people, structure, and assumptions, best designed to accomplish that mission? If not, what kind of institution ought it be, and how do we move it prudently from here to there?" Such a question may lead the constituencies of the seminary to search for a creative design for the seminary of the future that, in addition to the present scholarly structure, may accommodate some whose principal qualifications are that they have the gifts of (1) seeing things whole and (2) prophetic communication. They may or may not be scholars.

The Problem of Language

Part of my thinking about language in the field of religion comes from the opportunity I had as a young man in New York to attend services at Riverside Church when Harry Emerson Fosdick preached. These sermons were remarkable for their clarity and simplicity — all in the vocabulary of the ordinary person. I received some insight into his gift many years later when I was privileged to be in the company of a mutual friend to visit Dr. Fosdick in

his old age for an afternoon of conversation. In the course of this visit he told us that as a young man he had had a mental disturbance and had to have help to get himself reoriented. As a consequence he said that, in the years of his ministry he had reason to believe that he was a good preacher and writer but that the most rewarding satisfactions in his career were in one-to-one consultations with disturbed people. He felt that he was at his greatest effectiveness here because he could say to his counselee, "I know exactly how you feel because I have been there." The clarity and simplicity of his preaching must have been profoundly influenced by the centrality of personal counseling in his ministry.

However gifted they may be, pastors trained in seminaries need to communicate ideas that give hope and in language that is powerful and beautiful, words that lift the spirit. The chairperson of seminary trustees needs to be concerned that his school wields an influence on its students that favors this result.

The Seminary Chairperson as a Personal Role Model

By giving oversight to the pivotal part of the seminary's mission, critical thought, one has the opportunity to be a role model for those who carry equally important leadership in a local church, the lay leaders of its congregation.

It was argued earlier that seminary trustees and their chairpersons are expendable, but executives and administrators are not. So, in time, lay leaders in churches will come to accept that they are expendable but pastors are not. Expendable persons will take the higher risks of leading.

What Does "Serving the Churches" Mean?

How does a seminary know when it is serving the churches?

A consultant who has worked with several seminaries recently on restudying their missions reports, "one of the observations that comes out of this experience is the propensity of seminaries to give continuity to the safe kinds of ministry they perceive the churches which pay the bills as willing to subsidize." This states the common problem of *all* serving institutions: businesses, schools, churches, governments: what will the constituency, customer, citizen want and be willing to pay for *in the future*? Making this

judgment is probably most critical in business. (Witness the current plight of the US automobile industry — while they were still profitable they misjudged what the customer would want to buy in the future.)

A few years ago I found myself seated at a luncheon meeting in New York between the editors of two important magazines that were part of the same group. Plying my trade as I usually do, I engaged them on the question, "How do you make the decision, out of all the stories, articles, and pictures you have available, which ones you will print in your next issue?" Their prompt answer was most illuminating. I will reconstruct it as best I can.

"Most popular magazines make regular reader surveys in which they try to find out what readers liked best in the last issue, what they disliked or were not interested in, and what they would like to see more of in the future. In making the decision on the question you ask *you do not follow literally what readers tell you.* That is what killed the *Saturday Evening Post,* literally following what readers said they wanted more of. The problem is that readers cannot say what they will want more of in the future. What they will respond to in the next issues when they arrive depends somewhat on what happens in their lives, what public events have caught their attention, in the meantime. What makes magazine editing interesting and challenging is that *planning every issue requires a leap of imagination.* Part of what nourishes that leap is close attention to reader surveys, but only part. The rest of it is vast experience with journalism, knowledge about how people evolve and change, and watching closely what is going on in the world. We try to plant in every issue a seed that will grow into a need that we can serve in the future. That is how we editors, with our opportunities, can lead."

A seminary's relationship with churches is not like that of a magazine with its readers; but there is something to be learned from this example. Churches cannot tell seminaries what they will want in the future — and will be willing to pay for. If, as the consultant's observation quoted above suggests, some seminaries assume that churches will continue to want and be willing to pay for what they now receive — a "safe" ministry — providing that may make for a comfortable relationship in the present. But what

about the future? What about the future when the present, in terms of church influence and membership, is not good?

This is a question for a seminary chairperson who is disposed to try to influence his or her trustees to *lead*, to go out ahead and show the way and persuade seminary administrators and staff to act now, in the interest of the future soundness of churches. The seminary's prime concern is always for the future of churches. The future of churches will be determined importantly by the ideas, critical thought, that seminaries produce *now* and persuade churches to consider — *now*!

All true leadership — because it deals with the future — entails risk, and the chairperson who sees things whole will be the first to accept that risk and make the necessary leap of imagination. What supports the seminary chairperson in that risk (as distinguished from the editor of the magazine) is an inspired vision of what the seminary, and the churches that depend on it for intellectual and prophetic leadership, might become — greater servants of society.

Postscript

The positions taken here regarding the urgency of the need to raise seminaries from the present marginal state of some of them to fully serving institutions rest on beliefs about current America as a low serving society. Every category of institution I know about, including seminaries and churches, has far too many low-serving elements, when judged by the criterion of what is reasonable and possible with available resources, human and material. Why should anybody in government, business, or education try to do better when seminaries that should be models are not conspicuous for their service to society? If the quality of our total society is to be lifted, seminaries and then churches, one at a time, need to be lifted — substantially — into a position of preeminent service.

As noted earlier, both the initiative and the sustaining push to achieve this movement will come from trustees who are lay persons and who have a strong determined leader who chairs their effort. If the current chairperson does not feel up to giving this leadership, that person might quietly step aside and help find someone who can and will give that leadership — someone who

has the temperament and the staying power for the long hard struggle that may be required. It could be the supreme achievement of that person's life to learn to lead a seminary effectively and with spirit.

Alongside my convictions about lay influence of trustees in seminaries, I am equally firm about the importance of intellectual power in the seminary, a power that will enable its faculty and other staff to support churches and church institutions at a level of excellence in their performance that, on their own and without the support of the intellectual power of seminaries, might be quite ordinary.

Intellectual power could be said to have two main elements: scholarship and wisdom. What may be needed, first, is a new vision from within seminaries as they now stand, possibly one of those seminaries now labeled as marginal. It is the kind of vision that the King James version of Proverbs suggests is one without which the people perish. Such a vision may simply announce a yearning to be served by being led by a trustee chairperson who has the gift of seeing things whole — a person who is wise and who will give leadership to the end that the seminary comes to be accepted as both scholarly and wise.

And what would a seminary be like (as contrasted with what most are today) when it comes to be known as both scholarly and wise? In my essay *The Servant as Religious Leader* I speculate on what might be the characteristics of a seminary when significant formation of religious leaders takes place there.

— Its priorities will be reversed. Whereas seminaries are now mostly academic and only incidentally formative, formation of religious leaders will be primary and academic teaching will be secondary.

— The staff of the seminaries will contain a strong element of those who have a passion for growing religious leaders — and are good at it. They may or may not be scholars in the usual sense.

— A major mission of the seminary will be to evolve, and maintain, a theology of institutions that deals realistically with the problem of how to recover moribund institutions as vital, effective, caring, and serving. This will not be a

theoretical endeavor because it will be forged on the seminary's own experience as it builds itself into — and maintains itself as — the pivotal institution it is determined to become. Seminary students will be deeply involved in this continuous effort to build and maintain this theology. They will not just read and hear lectures about it.

— The primary mission of the seminary will be leading and serving churches and supporting them as strong influential institutions. Most of the learning of seminary students will result from involvement in this effort.

— There will be creative thinkers among its faculty who are developing and articulating a contemporary theology of what makes religious leaders, and the institutions they serve, strong. Students in the seminary will be deeply involved in responding to this with their own thinking.

— Such seminaries will become known as effective nurturers of able religious leaders and they will attract a wide spectrum of strong young people in search of such formative development. Some of these students might find their career opportunities in churches, but the seminary will become a prime source of religious leaders for all segments of society. It will acknowledge that any institution where religious leaders predominate may effectively become a church.

I submit these as achievable goals for a seminary whose constituencies (particularly the faculty that holds the predominant power) accept that new critical thought about both the seminary as an institution and its theology is essential. Further, they accept the leadership of the lay person who chairs their trustees and who is persuasive in helping them to reach those goals.

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